

## GETTING SUPPORT

IC can leave you feeling depressed and alone, but there are resources you can turn to for support. Tell your doctor or nurse your feelings and concerns. Try to give your friends, family, and partner as much information as possible to help them understand your condition, and let them know what they can do to help you. You may also want to join a support group for people with IC. For more information about IC and IC support groups in your area, contact the **Interstitial Cystitis Association** at 800-435-7422 or [www.ichelp.org](http://www.ichelp.org).



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# INTERSTITIAL CYSTITIS

## Understanding Your Painful Bladder Condition



## WHAT IS IC?

**Interstitial cystitis (IC)** is a chronic and painful condition of the bladder. People with IC have a bladder wall that is tender and easily irritated, leading to uncomfortable symptoms. If you have this condition, you're not alone. Thousands of people (mostly women, but also some men) are affected by IC. Although IC currently has no cure, the symptoms can be managed to help you feel better and live more comfortably.

### Symptoms of IC

IC symptoms are similar to those of a urinary tract infection. They include the following:

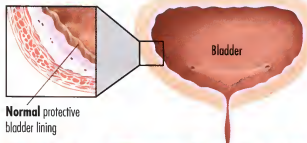
- The frequent and urgent need to urinate
- Pain or pressure in the bladder area, often relieved for a short time after urinating
- Pain in the genitals or anus
- Painful sexual intercourse

Symptoms may go away for a period of time (remission), but they often come back again.



## WHEN YOU HAVE IC

The **bladder** stores urine (your body's liquid waste) until it's passed out of the body. What happens in the bladder to cause IC is not clear, but some changes have been observed. The protective lining that keeps urine away from the bladder walls may become thinner. The walls may stiffen and harden so the bladder can't expand to hold urine. During certain tests, pinpoints of bleeding (**glomerulations**) may be seen on the bladder wall. Rarely, a crater (called a **Hunner's ulcer**) may also be found.



**Normal** protective bladder lining



**Thinning** of the protective bladder lining



**Pinpoint bleeding** (glomerulations) on the bladder wall



**Hunner's ulcer** in the bladder wall

### Possible Causes of IC

The cause of IC is still under debate, but possible causes include the following:

- Damage to the protective bladder lining, allowing urine to irritate the bladder wall
- Infection of the bladder
- Allergic reaction in the bladder
- Neurological (nerve) problems
- Substances found in the urine that are irritating to the bladder

One thing is certain—IC is *not* "all in your head."

## YOUR EVALUATION

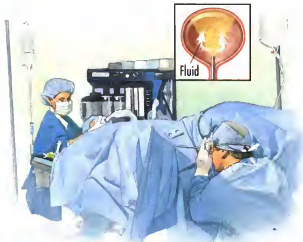
During your evaluation, your doctor first tries to rule out other problems that may be causing your symptoms. Your doctor may begin by asking you questions about your symptoms and your medical history. Then he or she may check your abdomen and examine your genital area for signs of a problem. Certain tests may also be done.

### Possible Tests

Tests that may be done to help diagnose IC or rule out other problems include the following:

- **Lab tests**, such as urinalysis and urine culture, to test for infection.
- **Cytology** (examination of urine under a microscope) to rule out cancer.
- **Urodynamic studies** to test the workings of the bladder, such as how the bladder fills and empties.
- **Cystoscopy**, visual examination of the bladder, to look for problems. The doctor looks at the bladder through a **cystoscope**, a tubelike instrument containing special lenses and a light. Cystoscopy is usually done in the hospital with general anesthesia so you are asleep. Your bladder is then filled with fluid to stretch the walls, a process called **hydrodistention**. A sample (biopsy) of bladder tissue may also be taken for examination.

**During cystoscopy**, your doctor examines your bladder and urethra before and after your bladder is stretched with fluid.



## YOUR TREATMENT OPTIONS

Many different types of treatment are available to help manage IC symptoms and relieve pain. Some may work well for one person and not for another, so several types of treatment may be tried before you and your doctor determine the plan that's best for you. Keep in touch with your doctor—tell him or her how each type of treatment is working. Treatment options include lifestyle changes, medications (taken by mouth or put directly into your bladder), biofeedback, electrical stimulation of the bladder, and, rarely, surgery.

### Lifestyle Changes

Making certain changes in the way you live may help you feel better. Try some of these suggestions:

- **Avoid the following foods** if they worsen your symptoms: alcohol, spicy foods, chocolate, caffeine, citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes, and carbonated drinks.
- **Retrain your bladder** if recommended by your doctor. This often involves holding urine in for longer and longer periods to help stretch the bladder and increase the amount the bladder can hold.
- **Manage stress** in your life. Stress doesn't cause IC, but it can make your symptoms worse. Ask your doctor about techniques to help you relax and relieve stress. Meditation, massage, and yoga are some possibilities. Exercise is an excellent way to help relieve stress. Walking and swimming are two good choices that may be comfortable enough for you to do regularly.



## Oral Medications

Certain medications may be prescribed for you to help manage your symptoms. These include the following:

- **Pain medications** for a short time to help ease discomfort
- **Antispasmodic medications** to help relax the bladder muscles and decrease the need to urinate
- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** and **antihistamines** to help reduce inflammation and relieve pain
- **Antidepressants** in low doses to help relieve IC symptoms, perhaps by blocking pain receptors
- **Medications to restore the bladder lining** such as pentosan polysulfate sodium (Elmiron)

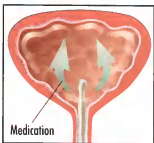


## Bladder Hydrodistention

Some patients have relief from symptoms for a time after bladder hydrodistention is done to diagnose IC. If this is true for you, your doctor may choose to repeat the hydrodistention procedure as a form of treatment.

## Bladder Instillation

Also called bladder wash or bath, **bladder instillation** may help relieve inflammation or repair the bladder's protective lining. During this treatment, the bladder is filled with medications using a slender tube called a **catheter**. One or more types of medication may be used. The medication is held inside the bladder for a period of time (usually from 15 to 30 minutes). Then the medication is urinated out or drained from the bladder through the catheter. Instillation treatments are often repeated several times over a period of two to three months.



## Biofeedback

Biofeedback is a painless technique that can help you learn to control the movement of your bladder muscles. During biofeedback, sensors are placed on your abdomen. The sensors convert signals given off by your muscles into lines on a computer screen.



## Electrical Stimulation

Stimulation of the area around your bladder with electrical signals may help relieve symptoms by blocking the nerve sensations to and from the bladder, by improving blood flow, or by strengthening the pelvic muscles. For this treatment (sometimes called **TENS**), wires are placed on the skin of the lower back or abdomen. Mild electric pulses are then sent into the body for several minutes to hours. The therapy may be repeated one or more times daily, and may continue for several weeks to months.

## Other Types of Treatments

Certain other types of treatments may be tried to help relieve your IC symptoms. **Therapeutic massage** of the abdominal muscles using heat or ice may help relieve pain. **Acupuncture**, the therapeutic use of needles, may also help relieve pain in some cases.

## Surgery

Surgery may be recommended for severe cases of IC that are not relieved by any other types of treatment. The results of surgery can be unpredictable. If your doctor recommends surgery, he or she can discuss the procedure's risks and benefits with you.